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AN INTERACTIVE, COMPUTER-AIDED HANDWRITING METHOD AND APPARATUS WITH ENHANCED DIGITIZATION TABLET

Abstract:

Abstract of WO0186612

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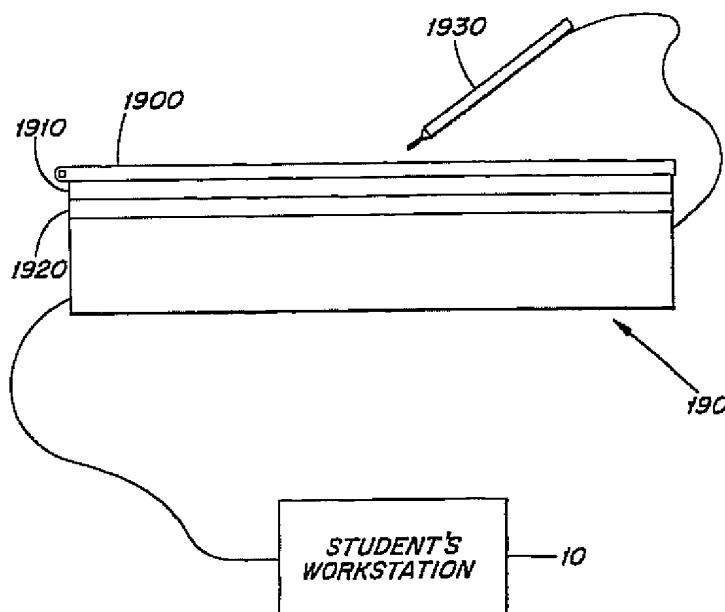
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(54) Title: AN INTERACTIVE, COMPUTER-AIDED HANDWRITING METHOD AND APPARATUS WITH ENHANCED DIGITIZATION TABLET



(57) Abstract: A digitizing tablet (190) for use in handwriting analysis is described. The tablet includes a digitizing layer (1920) for translating pressure from a stylus (1930) into digital information, a display layer (1910) for providing visible output that corresponds to a student's use of the stylus (1930) on the tablet, and an overlay layer (1900) for protecting the display layer (1910) and providing an electro-mechanical mechanism for erasing the displayed contents.

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AN INTERACTIVE, COMPUTER-AIDED
HANDWRITING METHOD AND APPARATUS WITH ENHANCED
DIGITIZATION TABLET

BACKGROUND

5 The present invention relates generally to educational methods at the classroom and individual level, as well as systems for implementing such methods. More particularly, the present invention relates to an educational method which combines audio-visual and computer technology to shift the teacher's role away from mass pupil instruction and paperwork and back to the more traditional role of helping each
10 individual student with his or her unique educational difficulties. Of particular significance in this application are methods and apparatus directed to teach speech/language skills to students.

 Classroom teaching methods have changed very little since the early days of our country. The bedrock of education remains the teacher or professor lecturing to groups
15 of students, commonly in conjunction with a text. Homework is assigned to reinforce the lessons learned in class and tests are administered to measure students' aptitude and retention of the material. At the early levels of education, the setting for this instruction has and continues to be the schoolroom, public or private, where a teacher is responsible for a group of, for example, fifteen to forty students.

20 The conventional classroom method of teaching a subject typically involves a lesson plan which includes a plurality of lectures each having an associated written homework assignment for the student to reinforce the lecture. The teacher collects and evaluates the homework and occasionally gives tests to measure the students' retention of the material. The teacher is also required to perform a multitude of other subsidiary
25 tasks, such as report card generation and parent-teacher conferences, to keep the community satisfied with both the students' and the teacher's performance. Thus under the conventional classroom scenario, teachers must split their time to assume the roles

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of administrator and public relation officer, as well their supposedly primary role of teacher.

Educators have long recognized that while the classroom scenario provides economies of scale, one drawback is that students of different ages and aptitudes learn at differing rates and with the need for varying amounts of individual attention. This recognition led to the availability of private tutoring, for those who could afford such, provides more flexibility to meet an individual student's needs. On the other hand, private tutoring has also been criticized since it does not provide the student with the opportunity to develop social skills which is inherent in the classroom setting.

Although this traditional method of education has changed little over the years, the amount of information which students need to assimilate to be considered well educated continues to increase geometrically. This fact is graphically illustrated by the technological wonders which surround us such as microcomputers, DNA mapping, videophones, the Internet, etc. The increase in information puts a correspondingly greater burden on teachers to try to cram more learning into the same amount of time, which leads to an associated increase in the amount of paperwork to be handled. Moreover, as fiscal resources grow more and more scarce, teachers have been required to handle even larger groups of students resulting in even less individual attention.

Although these problems are rapidly becoming more acute, they have been acknowledged by educators for many years. Many countries have reacted by adding more days to the school year or sending children to school at an earlier age so that students have more time to acquire the additional knowledge necessary. This solution, however, will only provide short term relief since there is only a finite amount of additional learning time which can be reasonably added to students' schedules, while our knowledge base will always continue to expand. Additionally, increasing the school year further aggravates the fiscal problem of education by requiring even greater economic resources and putting greater pressure on teachers.

Educators have also experimented with alternate teaching methods, such as self-study programs and videotaped lectures, to both more efficiently use teachers' time and to provide an element of individuality to a student's study program. Although these

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types of methods are somewhat successful at higher levels of education, they are generally ineffective at lower levels where younger students lack the discipline to teach themselves.

Another approach has been outlined in the afore-incorporated by reference
5 patents to John Lee et al. Therein, interactive educational methods and systems are described which provide a flexible alternative to the conventional classroom educational method. These educational methods integrate technology and learning in a manner which is specifically designed to make learning more effective for both students and teacher. For example, the computer-aided techniques describe therein relieve the
10 teacher of many of the non-teaching burdens discussed above, while also giving the student the opportunity to learn at his or her own pace. These systems also provide an interactive, audio-visual system which will encourage each student to learn at his or her own individual pace and using teaching techniques that are adapted to promote learning according to each individual's strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, each student is
15 provided with instructional reinforcement in the form of questions and his or her performance will be monitored by the system. If a student has difficulty with a particular area, the system will alert the teacher who can then provide additional help.

Another area of teaching in which it would be desirable to provide creative, computer-aided solutions is handwriting education. This type of education focuses on
20 teaching students how to correctly write letter, words and sentences. Recent technological advances in the area of digital handwriting analysis have provided the building blocks upon which computer-aided educational techniques can advance into the realm of handwriting education. Digitizing tablets, *per se*, exist for many functions, e.g., to capture a person's signature as part of a financial transaction involving the use
25 of a credit card.

An example of a computerized method and apparatus for teaching handwriting which uses this type of technology is found in U.S. Patent No. 5,730,602, the disclosure of which is incorporated here by reference. Therein, a computerized system prompts a student to use a digitizing pen to write a character on a digitizing surface.
30 The digitizing surface may include a thin LCD display on top of the digitizing tablet

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itself in order to provide visual feedback to the student of his or her handwriting without the need for the student to look up to another display. The digitizing tablet captures various parameters associated with the student's handwriting on the digitizing surface, e.g., pen tilt angle, (x,y) coordinates of the pen tip, pen tip height and timing
5 for each pixel. These captured values are then used to analyze the student's handwriting and provide feedback with respect thereto.

While the '602 patent addresses certain aspects of computerized handwriting analysis for education purposes, it still represents only an initial effort. The entirety of the process should be fun and functional. The digitizing table used in the '602 patent is
10 not specifically designed for handwriting analysis in the classroom and appears to be the same as that used to capture a digital signature for a credit card purchase. The present invention addresses this challenge and provides methods and systems for interactive, computer-aided handwriting education.

SUMMARY

15 A digitizing tablet for use in handwriting analysis is described. The tablet includes a digitizing layer for translating pressure from a stylus into digital information, a display layer for providing visible output that corresponds to a student's use of the stylus on the tablet, and an overlay layer for protecting the display layer and providing
an electro-mechanical mechanism for erasing the displayed contents.

20

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other advantages and objects of the invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments when read in conjunction with the attached Figures in which:

25 Figure 1 illustrates a block diagram of the elements of a system for implementing the educational method according to an embodiment of the present invention;

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Figure 2 sets forth a flow chart which indicates an overall sequence of events according to a preferred embodiment of an educational method according to the present invention;

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate flowcharts describing subprocesses of the sequence described in Figure 2;

Figure 5 is a flow chart illustrating another exemplary embodiment of the present invention;

Figures 6-16 depict exemplary interface screens of a teacher's workstation according to exemplary embodiments of the present invention;

Figure 17 is a flowchart describing an exemplary speech education method according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 18 is a block diagram depicting the general hardware and software elements associated with implementing the method of Figure 17;

Figure 19 depicts an exemplary handwriting analysis tablet according to exemplary embodiments of the present invention; and

Figures 20(a)-20(c) depict other designs associated with handwriting analysis tablets according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following description, for purposes of explanation and not limitation, specific details are set forth, such as particular circuits, circuit components, techniques, etc. in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced in other embodiments that depart from these specific details. In other instances, detailed descriptions of well-known methods, devices, and circuits are omitted so as not to obscure the description of the present invention.

A system for implementing the educational method according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention will be described with reference to Figure 1. In this exemplary embodiment it is envisioned that each student will be provided with a

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workstation 10 that may comprise all of the devices indicated in block form within the dotted lines of Figure 1 linked together via system bus 12. The workstation 10 can, for example, be microcomputer and the CPU 14 could be that which is part of the microcomputer. For example, an IBM PC having an Intel 80386, 80486 or Pentium® microprocessor could provide the platform for the workstation. Alternately, more or less powerful computer systems could be used.

The workstation 10 can be integrated within or around an ergonomic environment. Each station can include an ergonomically designed chair (not shown) so that the student can remain comfortably seated for extended periods of time. The display 16, which can be a conventional VGA monitor attached via a serial port to the system bus 12, can be mounted within a student's desk under glass at about a 45 degree angle. By providing workstations having the display 16 mounted under glass, the classroom as a whole is uncluttered and the teacher is able to readily observe both students and their respective workstation displays. Alternately, the display can simply rest on the desktop. In some preferred embodiments of the invention, the display will be touch sensitive so that a student can enter data and respond to questions from the computer via the screen.

The keyboard 18, floppy drives 20, and hard drive 22 are all conventional components attached via suitable interfaces to the CPU 14. The auxiliary input device 24 can be any type of pointing device such as a mouse, digitizing tablet or light pen. The CD-ROM device 26 and laser disk 28, for providing text data and video data, respectively, are also of a conventional design and can be either built-in to the workstation or provided as stand-alone models. Full screen video presentations, or partial screen windows or video presentations, can be stored on CD or laser disk using, for example, an IMPEG compression technique.

Each of the TV input module 30, audio interface 32, and stereo input module 34 can be off-the-shelf boards which are designed to plug into the expansion slots of a microcomputer in a known manner. The TV input module 30 is a board which allows a computer to receive television signals via either antenna or cable and convert those signals into image signals which can be displayed on all or part of the display 16. The

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audio interface 32 is an input/output board which allows the computer to send sounds, including voice and music, to a student via headphones (not shown) which plug into the board and receive such sounds via a microphone (not shown). Alternately, the audio interface could simply be a speaker which would be connected to a sound board and/or a voice synthesizer as is well known in the art. The stereo input module 34 is a board
5 which allows the microcomputer to receive radio transmissions or signals from a tape player, CD player or any other type of audio device, which a student could listen to as background music. Printer 36 can be any type of microcomputer compatible printer, including dot matrix, inkjet or laser printer, which communicates with the CPU in a
10 known manner.

All of the student workstations are in constant communication with a teacher's workstation 40 via a LAN interface 42 and local area network (LAN) 44. As described in more detail below, this real-time communication between student workstation and teacher workstation allows the teacher to be informed of the students' progress and
15 activities as well as allowing the teacher to tailor instructional programs for each student.

The foregoing description will be understood by one skilled in the art as merely an example of one system which could be used to implement the various embodiments of the educational method of the present invention described in detail below and that
20 various other configurations and devices could also be used. Reference to the conventionality of the various I/O devices described above is made merely to emphasize that one skilled in the art will recognize that the system described in Figure 1 can be implemented using known interfaces and software techniques.

Initially, one advantageous feature of the educational method according to the present invention is that courseware can be uniquely developed for each class, school,
25 school system or any other segment of a student population so as to provide a curriculum desired by the educators using the system and method of the present invention. The term "courseware" as used throughout this specification is meant to comprise the combination of control programs and data which provide each lesson to
30 the student at a workstation and includes, for example, both the information stored on

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the hard drive, laser disk, and CD-ROM, as well as that input through the TV input module, and the programmed presentation of that data. The phrase "lesson segment" is used to denote a block of material presented to a student which is intended to be viewed and interacted with in one sitting, typically 15-40 minutes. A lesson segment can also
5 be a test which evaluates the student's retention of one or more lesson segments or a whole semester's worth of material.

As a simplified example, history courseware dealing with the American Revolution might comprise a plurality of lesson segments. One lesson segment might include, for example, a narrative story of George Washington's role in the revolution.
10 The text of the story, read from the CD-ROM, might occupy one half of the display while illustrations, from the laser disk, occupy the other half of the screen. After each segment of the lesson, the program could test the student's comprehension by asking the student to answer a series of questions via the keyboard which relate to the previous segment of the lesson.

15 Thus the teacher or school system can select material including, for example, text, illustrations, length of lesson and questions to be answered, to comprise the courseware for any subject. This courseware development step in the educational method according to the present invention advantageously provides teachers and parents with the opportunity to create and update the educational material for presentation to the
20 students.

One skilled in the teaching art will appreciate that many other teaching tools could be integrated into the courseware, in addition to those mentioned above, to present various topics. For example, some topics, such as biology, are particularly conducive to teaching via film presentation. This material can be input via the TV
25 input module, or presented as computer video decompressed from a CD, and displayed while an accompanying voice description is listened to by the student on the headphone set.

Next, Figure 2 illustrates an exemplary preferred embodiment of an overview of an educational method according to the present invention wherein the student is using
30 the workstation and the system has been loaded with the developed courseware. In

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block 100, the teacher initializes the system and then the students enter their homework assignments from the previous day into the system at block 110. The homework assignment can be entered manually by the student typing the answers on the keyboard. Alternately, an optical scanning device (not shown) can be provided which is used to scan the homework paper and digitize the answers. In either case, the homework answers are compared to the expected answers by the CPU of each workstation and the results transmitted via the LAN to the teacher's workstation as indicated by block 120. The homework answers are stored in database files corresponding to each student name or ID number in the hard drive at the teacher's station for future use.

10 The teacher and/or a system program can then use the results of the homework assignments in conjunction with each student's progress, which has been stored in another database file at the end of the previous day, to assign lesson segments to each student as the process flow continues to block 130. Alternatively, lesson assignments can be determined solely on the basis of each student's progress and homework can be used either as a measure of retention or as a pretest. This assignment process allows the teacher and/or a system program to determine how much and what type of material each student can access for a given period of time, and provides the first of several opportunities for the teacher and/or system program to tailor each student's individual learning program.

20 Within the system, this assignment process is controlled by the CPU of the teacher's station which downloads the control programs corresponding to the lesson segments selected by the teacher and/or a system program from the hard drive or other storage device of the teacher's workstation to the selected student's station through the LAN. Alternately, a single control program could be downloaded to, or stored on, the students' workstations which will allow selection of lesson segments stored on the hard drive of each student's workstation. When run by the student these control programs access the various information storage devices to retrieve the audio and visual data created for each lesson segment.

30 In block 140, the process flow moves to the next step of displaying the main screen at each student work station. In addition to lesson segments, this screen can also

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include selections such as games, movies or educational video programs, and creative writing or drawing activities. These selections can also be chosen by the teacher, student, and/or a system program and can be downloaded through the LAN to each student workstation. As mentioned briefly above, depending on the educational level at which the system and method are being implemented, the student can make selections in a variety of ways. Younger students, for example, can make a selection by touching color-coded figures displayed on a touch-sensitive screen. More advanced students can make a selection by using the workstation's pointing device to click on the appropriate icon.

10 In decision blocks 141, 143, 145, and 147, the process flow checks to see which selection is made from the main screen. For exemplary purposes only, the choices of LESSON SEGMENT, GAME, VIDEO and END are illustrated in Figure 2, however it is to be understood that many other different types of selections can be provided. Based on the determined selection, an appropriate subroutine 142, 144, 146, or 148 is
15 executed. The LESSON SEGMENT selection will now be described with reference to Figure 3 which illustrates an exemplary flowchart breaking down some of the steps of a lesson segment subroutine as diagrammatically indicated at block 142.

A control program corresponding to the selected function which was previously stored on the hard drive or other storage device of the student's workstation during the assignment process is initiated in block 152. Prior to presenting a lesson, a pretest can be performed to determine the student's current level of comprehension of a subject. If the student's comprehension is sufficiently high, then the lesson presentation may be skipped and the student can be quizzed on this topic. Otherwise, the student then watches and listens to the audio-visual presentation created by the control program as
25 the process flow continues in block 153. For example, a series of mathematics problems may be presented on display 16 using computer-driven video of a teacher's prerecorded lesson. The control program will also provide software control options for the student such as adjustment of speed or volume of the presentation and the ability to stop and restart the presentation so that the student can take a break or ask the teacher a
30 question as discussed below.

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At decision block 154 the control program checks to see if it has presented all of the material for the lesson segment. If so, the subroutine ends and the control program goes to block 180 in Figure 3 to execute a quizzing subprocess described below. If not, the control program polls various flag variables associated with the commands available to the student during the presentation as shown at decision block 156. If a flag has not
5 been set, the control program loops back and continues displaying material at block 153 and then again checks if the lesson segment is over. If a flag has been set, indicating that the student wants to change or stop the presentation, the flow proceeds to a decision tree to implement the corresponding subroutine.

10 A first such exemplary subroutine is shown beginning at decision block 158, wherein it is asked whether the flag representing the STOP command was set. If not, the flow proceeds to the next command checking decision block 160. If the student has activated the stop command, the process flows to decision block 159 where the student is asked if he or she wishes to save the current position in the lesson segment and return
15 to the main screen. If so, a pointer indicating a last displayed time frame in the lesson segment is stored and the process goes back to block 140 in Figure 2. Otherwise the presentation is temporarily frozen at block 162. Next, the control program checks to see if the student has activated the restart command at decision block 164. If so, the process flow returns to block 153 and continues to display material in that loop. If not,
20 a counter is incremented at block 166 and the count is compared, at block 168, to a predetermined number, for example, a number equal to 5 minutes, to see if the teacher should be notified of the delay. If the current number is equal to the predetermined number, a message is sent over the LAN to notify the teacher at block 170, otherwise, the process flow loops back to again check if the restart command has been given.

25 The SPEED and VOLUME control commands are checked for and implemented at blocks 160, 172, 174, and 178 in a similar manner. Since these functional subroutines are not themselves part of the present invention and are well known in the art, they are not described in further detail herein. Moreover, one skilled in the art will appreciate that a plurality of other commands can be made available to the student by

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simply adding such subroutines to the decision tree and providing icons or areas of a touch-sensitive screen which will set a flag corresponding to that function.

After a lesson segment has finished being presented, the control flow according to this exemplary embodiment of the present invention goes from decision block 154 to block 180 which executes a quiz subroutine illustrated in more detail in Figure 4. At the end of each lesson segment, which can be designed at the courseware level to be of an optimal attention span length for the intended grade level of the student, typically there will be a series of questions retrieved from a database of questions associated with the particular lesson segment for the student to answer at block 182. The student enters his or her responses via the keyboard and the workstation CPU compares these responses to the correct answers stored in the database at blocks 184 and 186. The quiz can be time limited as discussed below. If desired, a grade on the student's responses can be generated and transmitted to the teacher's station for storage in the student's file.

At decision block 186, if the student has correctly answered all of the questions the flow loops back to the main screen block 140 of Figure 2, whereat the student can access another lesson segment, request recreational material, or end for the day. If the student has incorrectly answered some questions, the process flow loops back to block 153 of Figure 3 and the program retrieves and replays only material relating to those questions which were missed. This replayed material could be excerpted from the original presentation or it could be new material specifically designed to explain the correct answer to each incorrectly answered question. The process of replaying this material includes all of the steps discussed above with respect to subroutine block 142 and the subroutines of Figure 3. Alternatively, the presentation of remedial material might occur only when a student's quiz score is below a predetermined threshold.

After playing this remedial material, the same or different questions as those previously answered incorrectly will again be displayed and answered at blocks 182 and 184. The workstation CPU will again check the answers at decision block 186 and transmit the results to the teacher's station for storage. If all of the answers are correct, the process flow returns to the main screen block 140. If, however, after a predetermined number of tries the student still fails to grasp the material and answers

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some questions incorrectly, the process flows to block 190 and the student's workstation will send a message to the teacher's workstation indicating which material the student is having problems with. The teacher can then use his or her own methods to personally help the student to grasp the material.

5 According to another exemplary embodiment of the present invention, a curriculum database provides different ways of presenting the concepts contained in lesson segments. For example, the same lesson segment can correspond to plural presentations stored in the curriculum database, each of which is based on a different teaching style, format and/or media. Thus, each lesson segment will have
10 corresponding presentations stored in the curriculum database which emphasize, for example, voice or other audio information, pictures, animation, symbolism, analogy, repetition, and combinations thereof. Of course those skilled in the art will appreciate that these are only a few of the different media and different teaching styles which can be combined to provide different presentations for a particular lesson segment.

15 An exemplary usage of a curriculum database according to the present invention will now be described. Suppose that a student is working on a lesson segment in Algebra that is intended to convey the relationship between the equation $y = mx + b$ and a line on a graph. The student first works with an animated presentation that illustrates how the equation $y = x + 1$ corresponds to a line which has slope 1 and
20 intersects the y-axis at coordinate (0,1). For whatever reason, the student does not master this topic after working with this lesson segment, this lack of mastery indicated, for example, by the quizzing subroutine of Figure 4.

 The system then branches back to block 153 of Figure 3, as earlier described, for the presentation of additional material. In this case, the additional material
25 comprises all or part of a different presentation which corresponds to this Algebra lesson segment. For example, the system could provide a presentation which uses an audio and "hands on" approach, taking the student step-by-step through a process that asks the student to draw a graph on a piece of paper, write down the equation $y = x + 1$ and draw in points which come from the equation. This particular student, who
30 happens to grasp things better by actually doing them, now understands the concepts

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which eluded him or her after the first presentation and subsequently passes the next quizzing segment so that he or she can move on to new challenges.

Of course the foregoing is merely an example, and these presentations could have been described as being in the opposite order, the point being that different
5 approaches to presenting the same material are provided by the curriculum database to prevent frustration on the part of the student and accelerate the learning process. Moreover, the system can learn the idiosyncracies of the individual students and present lesson segments accordingly. Thus, if for example some students grasp material more quickly based on audio presentations, their first presentation of a lesson segment can be
10 one which has been predetermined to emphasize audio stimuli. If, on the other hand, other students react better to visual presentations, their first presentation can be one which has been predetermined to emphasize visual stimuli.

The system can learn the idiosyncracies of the students by conventional means, e.g., artificial intelligence, expert systems, simply generating statistics based on the
15 number of questions answered correctly after working with each category of presentation type, etc. This information can be compiled and stored in the LAN 44 or the teacher's workstation 40 and used to generate a preference ranking that tailors the order of initial presentation and remedial presentations for each student. Alternately, or in combination with this automatic method, the teacher can designate this order or any
20 part thereof for all or any number of students. The teacher can also temporarily override the presentation preferences of each student. If, for example, it is desired to test a new presentation package which has been added to the curriculum database, then the teacher could override the presentation ranking so that each student first accesses the new package for a particular lesson segment.

25 In addition to lesson segments, blocks 144 and 146 generally indicate game and video subroutines, respectively, which can be selected by a student from the main screen if they have been sent to the student workstation by the teacher and/or a system program. These selections can be used to reward the student or merely to provide a break from the more educational materials. Like the lesson segment function described
30 above, the selection of these functions initiates a control program which allows the

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student to play a game or watch a program for a predetermined time. After the predetermined time has elapsed, the program will return the student to the main screen where only lesson segment selections will be available so that the student can complete the assigned lessons for the day. Further detail regarding particular games and video
5 programs and their control are beyond the scope of this disclosure and can be readily implemented using conventional means. Again it should be noted that games and videos are detailed herein only as examples of other functions which can be integrated into the system and method according to the present invention and that many other selections and functions can be readily implemented by one skilled in the art.

10 The END function which is recognized by decision block 147 and implemented at block 148 of Figure 2 can be selected by the student at the end of the day or as a logoff feature if other students need to use the workstation. Housekeeping software will update the database files at the teacher's station regarding the student's activity during the session being terminated. Homework for the following day corresponding to
15 the lesson segments completed during the session can be can be retrieved from memory and generated by the printer. Additionally, progress reports or remedial notes can be generated at the printer for the student to take home to his or her parents.

The teacher's workstation 40 can comprise a system similar to that of the student workstation 10 which may be enhanced to provide sufficient processing resources to
20 control the LAN and provide monitoring capabilities of each of the student workstations tied into the LAN. The teacher's workstation can include a more powerful CPU, larger on-board memory and a larger hard drive to store, for example, all of the various databases used to store information received from the students' workstations. In addition to the functions discussed above, the teacher's workstation also provides the
25 teacher with other capabilities including, editing the databases associated with the materials and questions of the lesson segments and report generation features which allow the teacher to easily generate grade reports on any or all of the students. An exemplary teacher's workstation will now be described with respect to Figures 6-16 which show exemplary interface screens.

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Figure 6 depicts a first menu from which a teacher may select various submenus, the classroom shutdown command or the quit command. The class shutdown command provides a way in which the teacher can signal the students' workstations that, for example, the end of a class period is approaching and that students should not be permitted to access additional lesson segments which might extend beyond the end of the classroom period. The classroom setup submenu is illustrated in Figure 7. Therein various functions including adding or changing a student's information, deleting a student, printing the classroom lists, and printing logon names are provided. An exemplary screen for adding or changing a student appears as Figure 8.

The lesson setup or lesson maintenance menu is illustrated as Figure 9. Each of the first five options listed from the top of this menu have examples thereof shown in Figures 10-14. By clicking on the print lesson information option, the teacher has the ability to capture information regarding the lessons in printed form. As can be seen in Figure 10, each lesson segment can be presented to the students in any order desired by the teacher. For example, the teacher could change the numbers indicated in the "lesson order" column to change the order of lesson presentation based upon his or her teaching experience.

Figure 11 shows an exemplary chapter test location menu which allows the teacher to selectively determine when quizzing will be performed relative to the presentation of the lessons. Additionally, a teacher can exclude certain lessons from the quiz as desired. Figure 12 shows an exemplary interface which can be used for the teacher to determine what score on a quiz will allow a student to proceed to the next lesson. For example, a threshold score can be entered in the "Grade" column which will allow a student to proceed to the next lesson. Each quiz can have its own score for passing individually determined by the teacher or a universal threshold could be provided for all quizzes.

Figure 13 displays an interface which can be used at the supervisory station to provide a maximum quiz time within which period a student must finish taking a quiz. At the end of this maximum time, the system would then evaluate the student's current

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responses and provide a grade or score. The homework editor screen of Figure 14 can be used by the teacher to associate various assignments with each lesson presented by the system. Thus, at the end of a class (as indicated by the teacher shutting down the classroom) homework can be generated based upon the entries and changes made by teacher on this screen.

Figure 15 illustrates a gradebook menu screen which allows the teacher to easily output grades either as a hard copy or to the teacher's display. Although the screen shows two examples of ways in which grade information can be output, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that the grade database can be queried in a number of different ways to produce different reports. One exemplary report is illustrated as Figure 16. In this screen, the students are alphabetized and their scores and progress through each lesson segment is both graphically and numerically portrayed so that a teacher can use this gradebook screen to quickly determine which student or students are having problems with which particular lesson segments, i.e., by looking at the color coded indications on the screen.

According to another exemplary embodiment of the present invention, speech education can also be provided as a feature of the aforescribed system. As mentioned above, speech education according to the present invention refers to techniques which are more interactive and dynamic than conventional speech recognition. An example will be provided using the flowchart depicted in Figure 17 as well as the conceptual block diagram of Figure 18 which identifies some of the hardware and software components involved in the speech education techniques according to the present invention.

First, speech education according to the present invention provides the ability for the system to provide one or more visual and/or audible examples of phonemes, syllables, words, phrases or sentences that are the object of the lesson. This can be accomplished by, for example, an object word "theatrical" being displayed on display 16 and a correct pronunciation thereof output as synthesized speech from audio interface 32 (e.g., via speaker(s) 1800). As with the earlier described embodiments, the manner in which examples are provided by the system, e.g., a straightforward

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visual representation of the word, a picture reinforcement illustrating the word, a visual representation of the word made up of its composite phonemes (as in the dictionary, typically to the right of the word itself), an audio segment of a speech professional saying the word or an audio segment of a speech professional saying each phoneme that makes up the word individually, can be established by the teacher using the teacher's workstation 40 to set the parameters for the speech education class, at the student's own workstation 10, or by the system based upon the student's own preferred learning style as reflected by a pattern of correct/incorrect responses. For example as in the previous embodiments, the system can initiate the lesson using a first style of example (audible repetition of the object word) and, for failed attempts, can repeat the example with a reinforcing example which emphasizes a different stimuli (e.g., a visual or audible phonetically broken down version of the word). Moreover the number of repetitions of each example is also variable by the system, e.g., under the control of the teacher at the teacher's workstation 40.

The example or examples can be provided to the student in conjunction with the the courseware's display of educational aids on the display 16 via graphical user interface (GUI) 1804. In this instance the courseware is referred to as application software layer 1806 to refer to its interface and control functionality for speech engine 1808 (described below) and GUI 1804. The speech objects of interest can, for example, appear to be pronounced by an educational character displayed on display 16.

Once the example or examples have been provided, the student will be prompted to repeat a speech object at step 1702. This prompt can also be visual, audible or both. Additionally, it may be useful to prompt the student to repeat the speech object multiple times, e.g., in order to allow the system to grade and average multiple responses to provide a more accurate assessment of the student's ability to properly pronounce the object. The student's responses are captured by the system, e.g., by a microphone 1802 which is included in audio interface 32 of the student's workstation. Depending upon the ambient conditions, various approaches and techniques can be implemented to enhance the process of capturing an accurate electrical representation of the responses uttered by the student. For example, the

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microphone 1802 can be implemented as a so-called horn microphone having a conically-shaped input element designed to funnel the speech input into the transducer which captures the speech information. Additionally, or in the alternative, echo cancelling techniques and other noise reduction signal processing techniques, which
5 signal processing techniques are well known in other arts, e.g., cellular telephones, can also be added to improve the captured speech information. Once captured, the student's responses are recorded e.g., in any of the memory devices associated with the student's workstation 10 (e.g., hard drive 22), the LAN 44 or the teacher's workstation.

10 Having captured the student's response(s), the next step 1706 in interactive speech education techniques according to the present invention is to evaluate those responses. This can be accomplished using any suitable software speech engine 1808 designed for the purposes of speech evaluation. However, Applicants have determined that it is preferable that the software engine be able to analyze the speech object
15 responses at a phoneme level rather than a word level. Accordingly the software engine which is selected for this task should be capable of breaking down the captured responses into their individual phonemes and grading the pronunciation of each phoneme. An example of this type of software engine is that produced by Idioma Ltd., an Israeli company having a place of business at 15 Maskit Street, Herzeliya, 46733,
20 Israel. The interested reader can find additional information about this exemplary software engine at <http://www.idioma.co.il>, the disclosure of which is expressly incorporated here by reference. Those skilled in the art will appreciate, however, that other speech evaluation engines could also be used to implement the present invention.

The output of the software engine 1806 is further processed by the application
25 software 1804 running on workstation 10 to determine an appropriate reinforcer based on the evaluated responses. For example, the software engine 1806 may provide as an output a numerical grade of each phoneme in the recorded version or versions of the speech object. This output can then be evaluated by the application software to provide a suitable reinforcer and/or to determine and perform a repetitive exercise intended to
30 correct a mispronounced word.

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For example, suppose that the software engine 1806 evaluates the phonemes in two captured versions of the word "theatrical" and outputs averaged numerical grades of 90%, 92%, 84% and 99% for the four phonemes which comprise this speech object. The application software 1804 would receive these numerical grades and compare them with a threshold, which may be settable by the teacher at his or her workstation. In this example, suppose that the threshold is 80% such that this was considered by the system to be correctly pronounced. The application software 1804 would make this determination and command the GUI 1802 to output a positive reinforcer at step 1708, e.g., one of the educational characters saying "Good Job Ellen!".

Alternatively, suppose that the first phoneme "the" in the speech object "theatrical" is mispronounced (i.e., below a certain threshold of identity as compared with the correct enunciation of this phoneme) as determined by application software based on its evaluation of the output of software engine 1806, but that the remaining phonemes are pronounced correctly. In this case, the application software 1806 can command GUI 1804 to output a repetitive reinforcer, e.g., by having an educational character repronounce the word "theatrical" with emphasis on the first phoneme and/or displaying the word broken down into its phonemes with the first phoneme highlighted. As mentioned earlier, the decision-making as to the manner and stimuli in which examples and remedial examples are output on the part of application software 1806 can also be influenced by a student's recorded history of exercise-mistake-corrective example-response to enhance the learning process. For example, if this particular student has a recorded history of correcting mistakes with fewer iterations using audible emphasis for incorrectly pronounced phonemes, then this type of remedial reinforcement can be provided at step 1708. Application software 1806 can also decide to perform another iteration of the flow illustrated in Figure 17 if the grades output by speech engine 1808 warrant retrying that particular speech object.

Although the foregoing description has been directed to an exemplary system for implementing educational methods according to the present invention, one skilled in the art will appreciate that many other systems or variations of the system described above could readily be configured to implement an educational method according to the

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present invention. For example, other types of memory storage devices and communication systems linking the student workstations to the teacher workstation could be readily implemented. Methods according to the present invention are also not limited to a single group of student terminals linked to a single teacher's workstation, but could include an entire school's workstations or more.

Moreover, one skilled in the art will readily appreciate that emerging multimedia technologies and computer developments readily lend themselves to integration with various embodiments of the present invention. For example, expert systems could be used as part of the courseware so that the system develops its own questioning and remedial presentation techniques. Moreover, the advent of computer voice synthesis and recognition provides another alternative for both student input and system audio output.

According to another exemplary embodiment illustrated in Figure 19, a digitizing tablet is provided for the purposes of handwriting analysis and education. Examples of processing techniques for analyzing the digital input acquired through tablet 190 can be found in the afore-mentioned U.S. Patent No. 5,730,602, as well as U.S. Patents Nos. 5,247,138 and 5,559,897, the disclosures of which are incorporated here by reference. The particular algorithm applied in the student's workstation 10 (or teacher's workstation if the digitized data is forwarded thereto through the LAN) for performing handwriting analysis is not particularly relevant to the discussion of the tablet 190 and, therefore, is omitted here.

Unlike the tablet described in the '602 patent, tablet 190 includes a removable clear overlay 1900 disposed on top thereof. Overlay 1900 may be formed of a plastic material and is attached at one end thereof to the tablet 190. Tablet 190 also includes a display layer 1910 and a digitizing layer 1920. The display layer 1910 operates in conjunction with the overlay layer 1900 to provide a visible display of the student's handwriting efforts. When the stylus 1930 is pressed onto the clear overlay 1900, the overlay contacts and adheres to the display layer 1910, resulting in a dark, visible mark at the point of contact. The pressure is also detected (through the display layer 1910) and translated by the digitizing layer 1920, e.g., in a manner similar to that described in

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U.S. Patent No. 5,730,602, to provide a digital output representative of the student's handwriting for analysis by the student's workstation 10. As the handwriting stroke continues, the pressure on overlay 1900 and display layer 1910 result in a continuation of the dark, visible marking on the display layer.

5 Unlike, however, the LCD/digitizing layer combination used in the tablet of U.S. Patent No. 5,730,602 which provides an electro-chemical display mechanism, the clear overlay 1900 and display layer 1910 provide a mechanically visible result. Moreover, the removable clear overlay 1900 can be drawn back from the display layer 1910 to erase the dark, visible lines created thereon by the stylus pressure during a
10 handwriting exercise. That is, removal of the clear overlay 1900 resets the display surface to its default color (e.g., grey) by disrupting the adherence between the clear overlay 1900 and the display layer 1910. Applicant believes that this particular erasure operation should prove to add an enjoyable component to the handwriting education system and method described herein. Figures 20(a)-20(c) depict exemplary design
15 aspects of handwriting tablets according to the present invention. Note, for example, that according to this exemplary embodiment, that the overlay has its own frame which is hingedly connected to the main frame of the tablet.

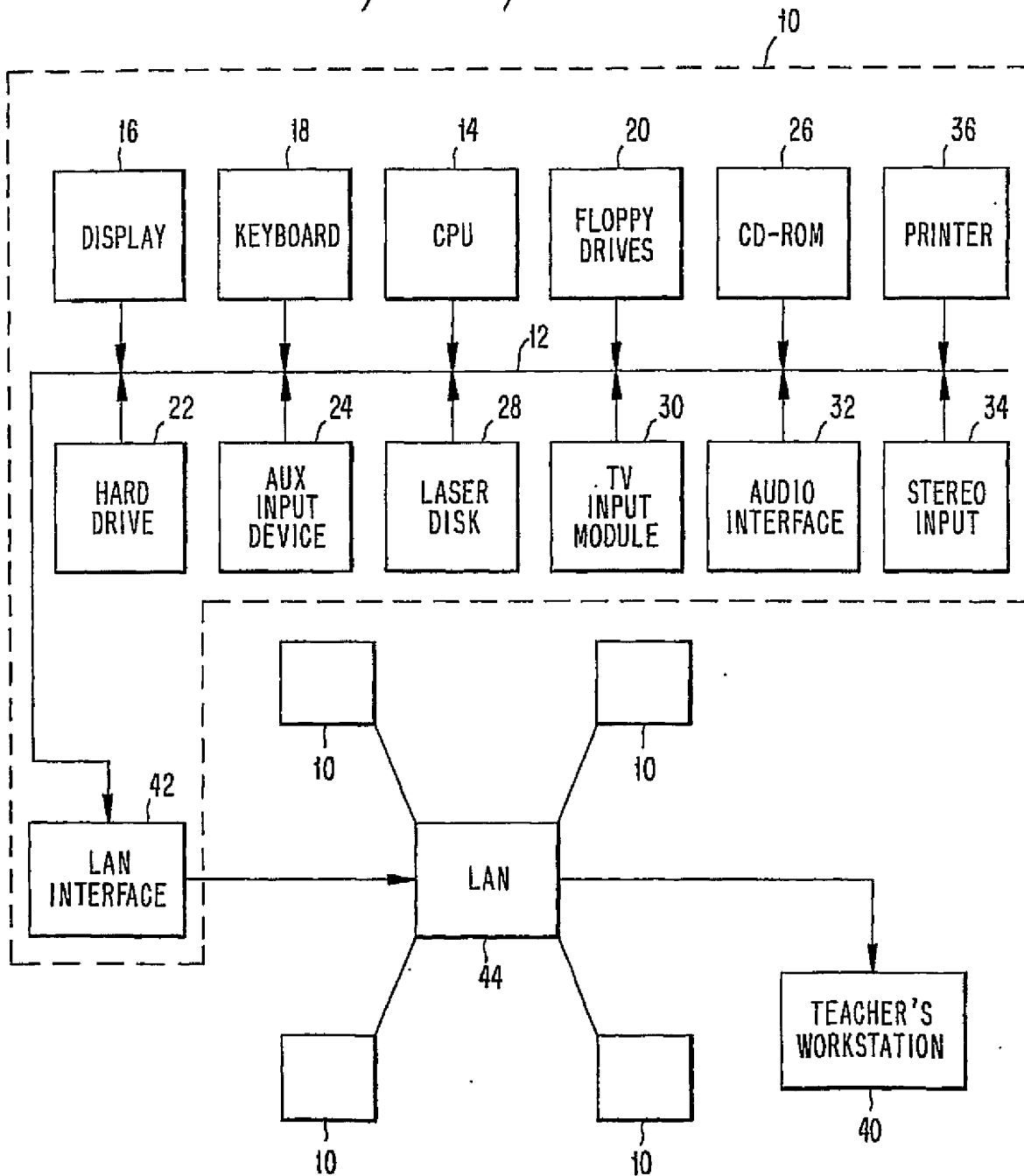
 The foregoing description which sets forth exemplary preferred embodiments of a novel educational method and system for carrying out such a method is merely
20 intended to be illustrative of the present invention rather than restrictive or limitative thereof. On the other hand, the scope of the invention is set forth in the appended claims which are intended to encompass what is directly set forth therein as well as reasonable equivalents thereof including those expressly and implicitly set forth in the disclosure.

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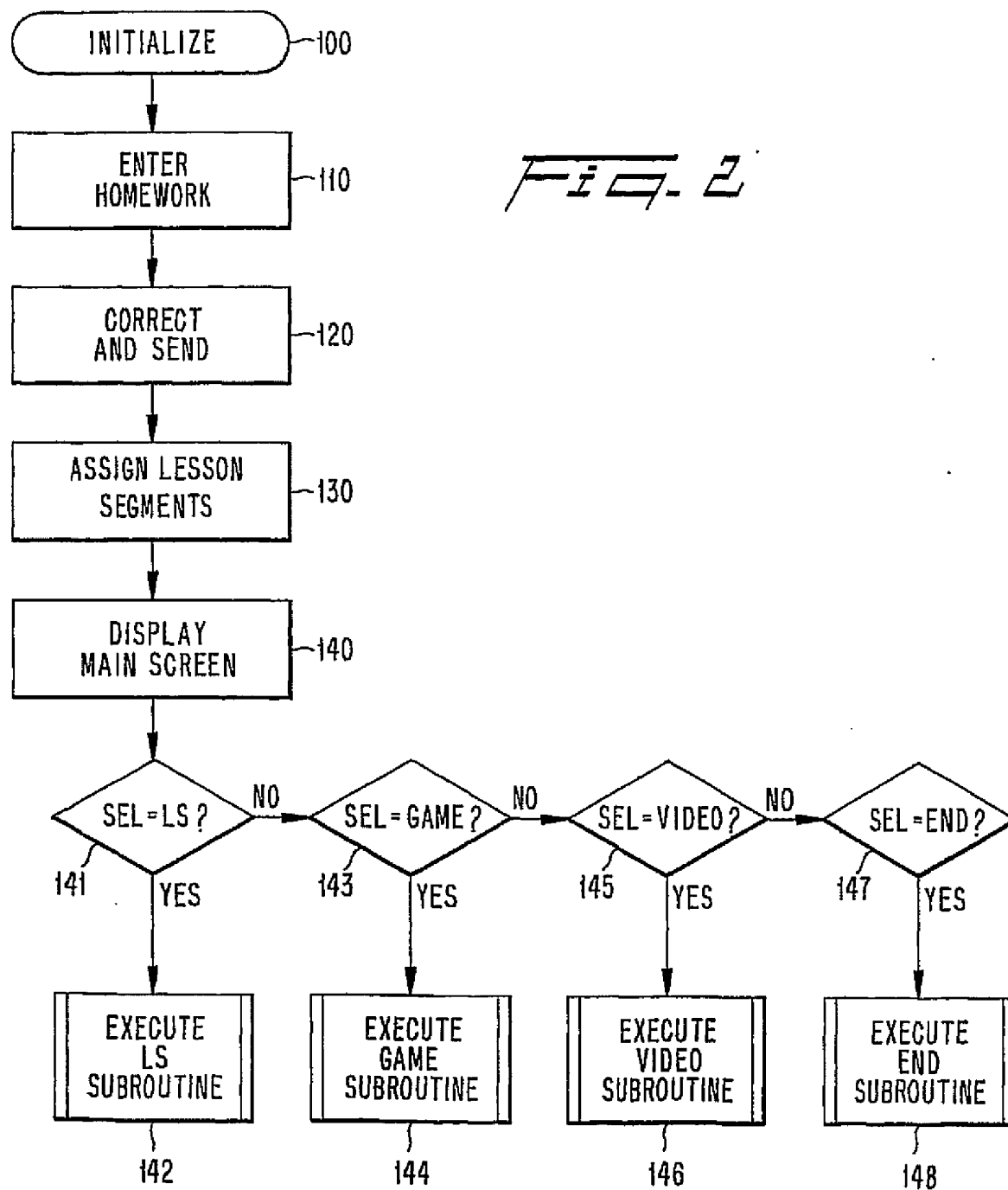
What is claimed is:

1. A digitizing tablet for use in handwriting analysis comprising:
a digitizing layer for digitizing input from a stylus;
a display layer, disposed on top of said digitizing layer, for displaying
5 said input from said stylus; and
an overlay layer, disposed on top of said display layer, which, when
moved away from said display layer, erases said displayed input.
2. The digitizing tablet of claim 1, wherein said overlay layer has a frame
which surrounds a clear surface and which is attached via hinges to a frame of said
10 digitizing tablet.

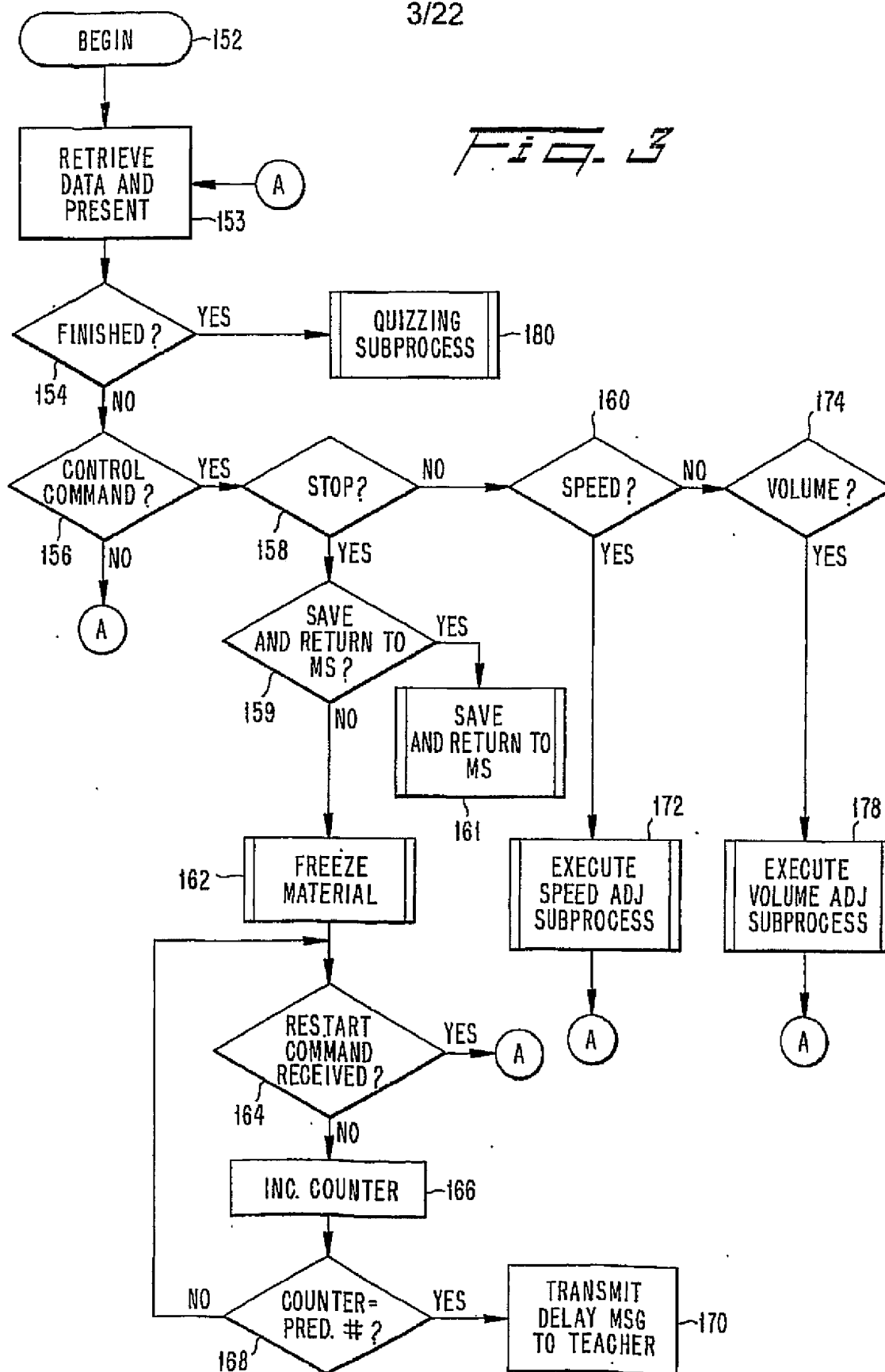
1/22

FIG. 1

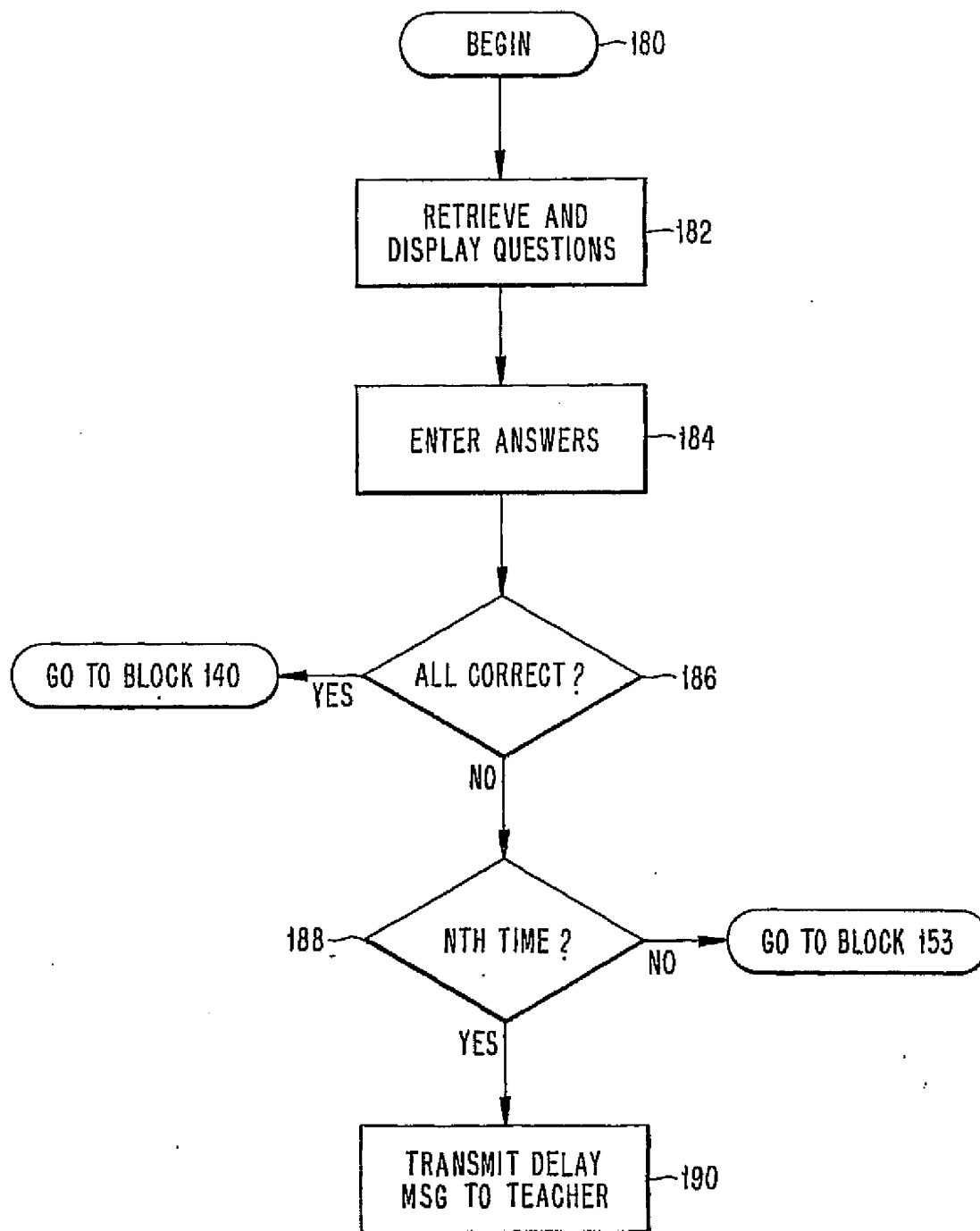
2/22



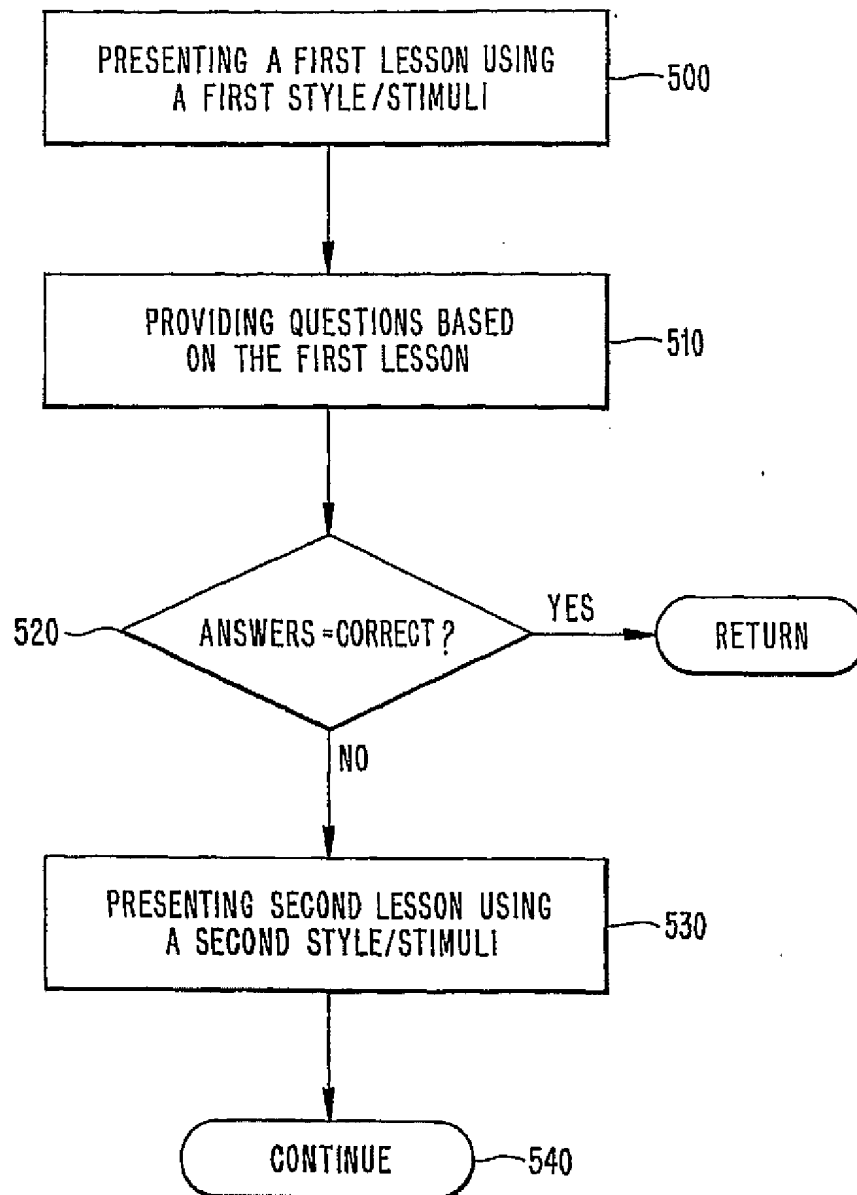
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FIG. 3

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Fig. 4

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FIG. 5

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I Can Learn	
	Classroom Setup
	Lesson Setup
	Check Homework
	Gradebook
	Classroom Shutdown
	Quit

FIGURE 6

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Classroom Setup Menu	
	Add or Change a Student
	Delete a Student
	Print Classroom List
	Print Logon Names
	return to main menu

Form View








FIGURE 7

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Add or Change a Student									
<p>Choose a student name from the box below or click the New Student button to add a student</p> <div> <div>Alvandia</div> <div>▼</div> <div>New Student</div> </div>									
Student Name		Last Name		First Name		Middle Name		Disciplinary record	
Alvandia		John		Alexus					
Logon Name		Period		Used logon names					
alvandia		5		alvandia					
Preferred Name		Gender							
Johnny		M		alvandia					
Soc.Sec.No.				anderson					
				andrews					
Birthday		Home Phone		Work Phone		Parent/Guardian		Home Address	
								LA	
<div>Done</div>									
Enter students last name									

FIGURE 8

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Lesson Maintenance Menu	
	Set Lesson Order
	Set Chapter Test Locations
	Set Lesson Mastery Grades
	Set Maximum Quiz Time
	Edit Homework Assignments
	Print Lesson Information
	return to main menu

Form View

FIGURE 9

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FIGURE
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Set Lesson Order		Lesson Order
Lesson		
5,15,16 Squaring a binomial and finding the product of a sum and difference		1
6.1,6.2 Writing a number in prime factorization & finding the greatest common factor		2
6.3 Factoring the greatest common monomial factor from a polynomial		3
6.4a Factoring the difference between two square and perfect trinomial square		4
6.4b Factoring x^2+bx+c when c is greater than 0		5
6.4c Factoring x^2+bx+c when c is less than 0		6
6.4d Factoring x^2+bx+c		7
6.5 Factoring by removing a common binomial factor & then grouping the terms		8
6.6 Factoring a polynomial completely		9
6.7 Solving polynomial equations by factoring		10
6.8 The practical use of polynomial equations		11
7.1 Defining a rational expression and determining the restricted values		12
7.2 Simplifying rational expressions		13
7.3 Multiplying rational expressions		14
7.4 Dividing rational expressions		15
7.5,7.6 Finding the LCD of rational expressions & changing fractions to equivalent fractions		16
7.7 Adding and subtracting rational expressions		17
7.8 Adding and subtracting polynomial and rational expressions		18
7.9 Simplifying complex fractions		19
7.10 Dividing polynomials		

Instructions
Number the lessons you wish to be taught sequentially starting with 1. Be sure not to repeat a number or else an error will occur.

Done

Enter the lesson order

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Chapter Test Locations			
Lesson Order	Lesson Name	Description	Test number
1	6.1,6.2	Writing a number in prime factorization & finding the gr	1
2	6.3	Factoring the greatest common monomial factor from a	1
3	6.4a	Factoring the difference between two square and perf	1
4	6.4b	Factoring x^2+bx+c when c is greater than 0	1
5	6.4c	Factoring x^2+bx+c when c is less than 0	1
6	6.4d	Factoring x^2+bx+c	1
7	6.5	Factoring by removing a common binomial factor & the	1
8	6.6	Factoring a polynomial completely	1
9	6.7	Solving polynomial equations by factoring	1
10	6.8	The practical use of polynomial equations	1
11	7.1	Defining a rational expression and determining the rest	2
12	7.2	Simplifying rational expressions	2
13	7.3	Multiplying rational expressions	2
14	7.4	Dividing rational expressions	2
15	7.5,7.6	Finding the LCD of rational expr. & changing fractions t	2
16	7.7	Adding and subtracting rational expressions	2
17	7.8	Adding and subtracting polynomials and rational expre	2
18	7.9	Simplifying complex fractions	2
19	7.10	Dividing polynomials	2
20	7.11,12	Expressing ratios in simplest forms & solving equation	2
21	7.13	Solving rational equations	2
22	8.1	Graphing ordered pairs of numbers	3
<div> <div>Set Lesson Order</div> <div>Done</div> </div>			
Check this box to generate a chapter test after this lesson			

FIGURE

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Mastery Grade Setup		Grade
Select Objective	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 All	100
Lesson Description		100
1.0 Order of Operations		100
1.1 Evaluating algebraic expressions		100
1.2 Writing algebraic expressions for word phrases		100
1.3 Graphing real numbers using a number line		100
1.4 Classifying numbers into subsets of real numbers		100
1.5 Comparing and ordering real numbers		100
1.6 Using opposites and absolute values		100
1.7a Adding real numbers on a number line		100
1.7b,c The addition rule of real numbers		100
1.8 Subtracting real numbers		100
1.9 Multiplying real numbers		100
1.10 Dividing of real numbers		100
2.1a Evaluating expressions using the order of operations		100
2.1b Evaluating expressions containing exponents		100
2.1c Evaluate formulas for given values of the variables		100
2.1d Simplifying algebraic expressions by combining like terms		100
2.1e Simplifying and evaluating algebraic expressions containing grouping symbol		100
2.2a-d Simplifying expressions using the property of real numbers		100
2.2e Simplifying expressions using the property of -1		100
2.3 Translating a word phrase to algebraic expression		100
Done		

Set the grade required on the quiz to proceed to the next lesson

FIGURE

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Maximum Quiz Time	
Select Objective	Time (in minutes)
Lesson Description	
1.0 Order of Operations	30
1.1 Evaluating algebraic expressions	30
1.2 Writing algebraic expressions for word phrases	30
1.3 Graphing real numbers using a number line	30
1.4 Classifying numbers into subsets of real numbers	30
1.5 Comparing and ordering real numbers	30
1.6 Using opposites and absolute values	30
1.7a Adding real numbers on a number line	30
1.7b,c The addition rule of real numbers	30
1.8 Subtracting real numbers	30
1.9 Multiplying real numbers	30
1.10 Dividing of real numbers	30
2.1a Evaluating expressions using the order of operations	30
2.1b Evaluating expressions containing exponents	30
2.1c Evaluate formulas for given values of the variables	30
2.1d Simplifying algebraic expressions by combining like terms	30
2.1e Simplifying and evaluating algebraic expressions containing grouping sym	30
2.2a-d Simplifying expressions using the property of real numbers	30
2.2e Simplifying expressions using the property of -1	30
Done	

Set the maximum time a student may spend in the quiz

FIGURE





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Homework Editor		Done
Choose a lesson	Lesson Order	7
Description	Factoring by removing a common binomial factor & then grouping the terms	
Pretest Assignment:	p.287/14,16,18	
Lesson Assignment:	p.294/1-13 odd; 14-30 even; 31-41 odd	
Review Assignment:		
Quiz Assignment:		
Final Assignment:		
Enter the desired homework assignment		

FIGURE 14

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Gradebook Menu	
	Show Gradebook
	Print Grades for a Period
	Print Grades for a Specific Date
	return to main menu

Form View

FIGURE 15

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Refresh Grades	Period	Grades For Test																Test
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Brinson, Jr. James	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
Brion, Brana	100	100	100	100	100	100	75	75	80	100	100							
Brousseau, Kristen	100	100	100	100	100	75	100	100	100									
Cains, Latoya	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	75	100	100	100					72	
Cassimere, Jr. James	100	87	100	75	100	100	75	50										
Celestine, Cyril	100	100	100	100		100	75	100	80									
Crosby, Jamie	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	75	80	80	100							
Davis, Areka	100	100	100			25	100	80	100	100								
Delandro, Trelles	100	100	100	100	12	100	100	80	80									
Earin, Eugenique	100	100	100	100	100	100		80	80	100							32	
Fard, Jerome	100	100	100	100	100	100	75	100	80	100	66							
Fortune, Chanelle	100	100	100	100	100	100				100	100						36	
Francis, Jovonda	100	100	60		100	75	75											

☐ bypassed lesson
☐ 2 attempts
☐ 100 1 attempt
☐ 100 3+ attempts

☒ not mastered - 1 attempt so far
☒ not mastered - 2 attempts so far
☒ not mastered - 3+ attempts so far

FIGURE
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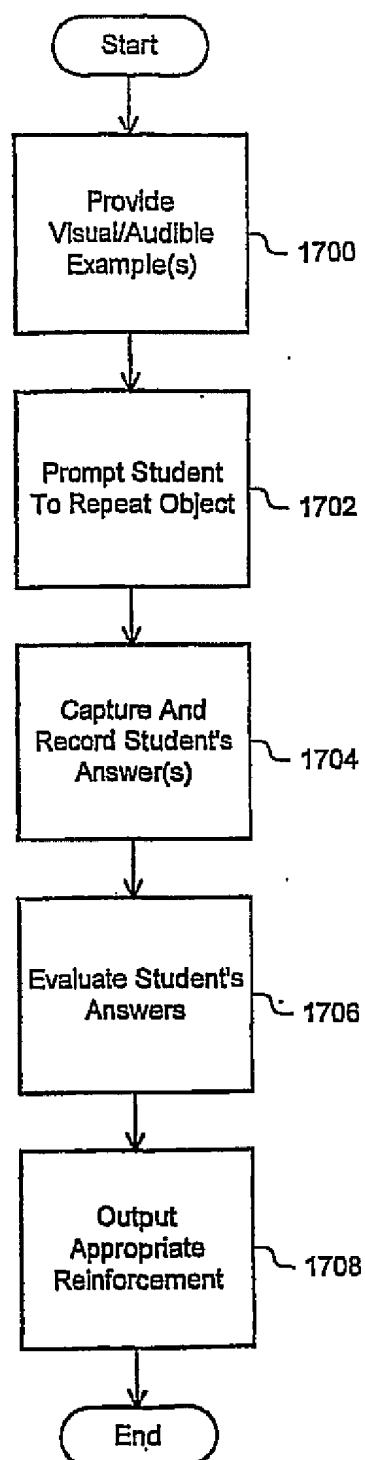
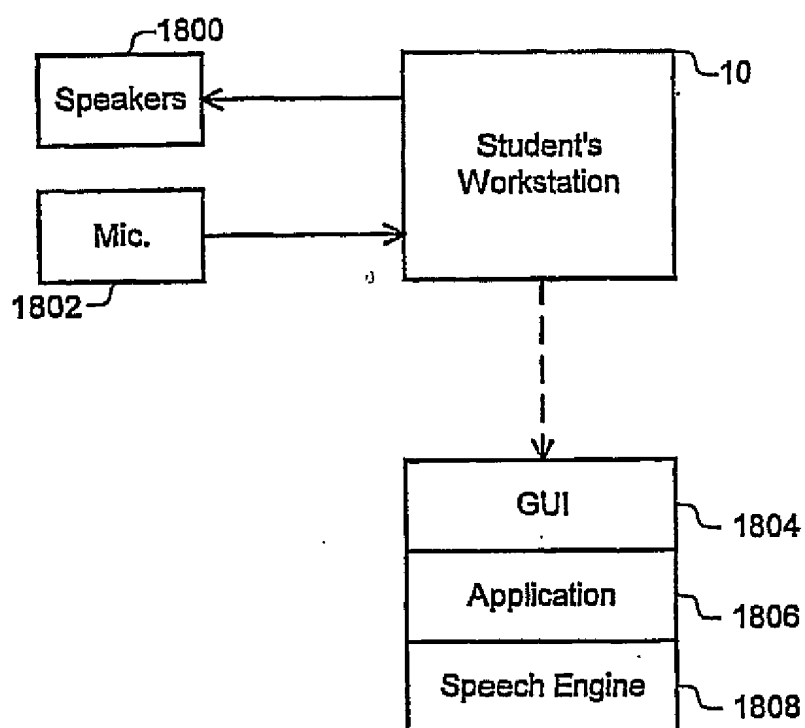
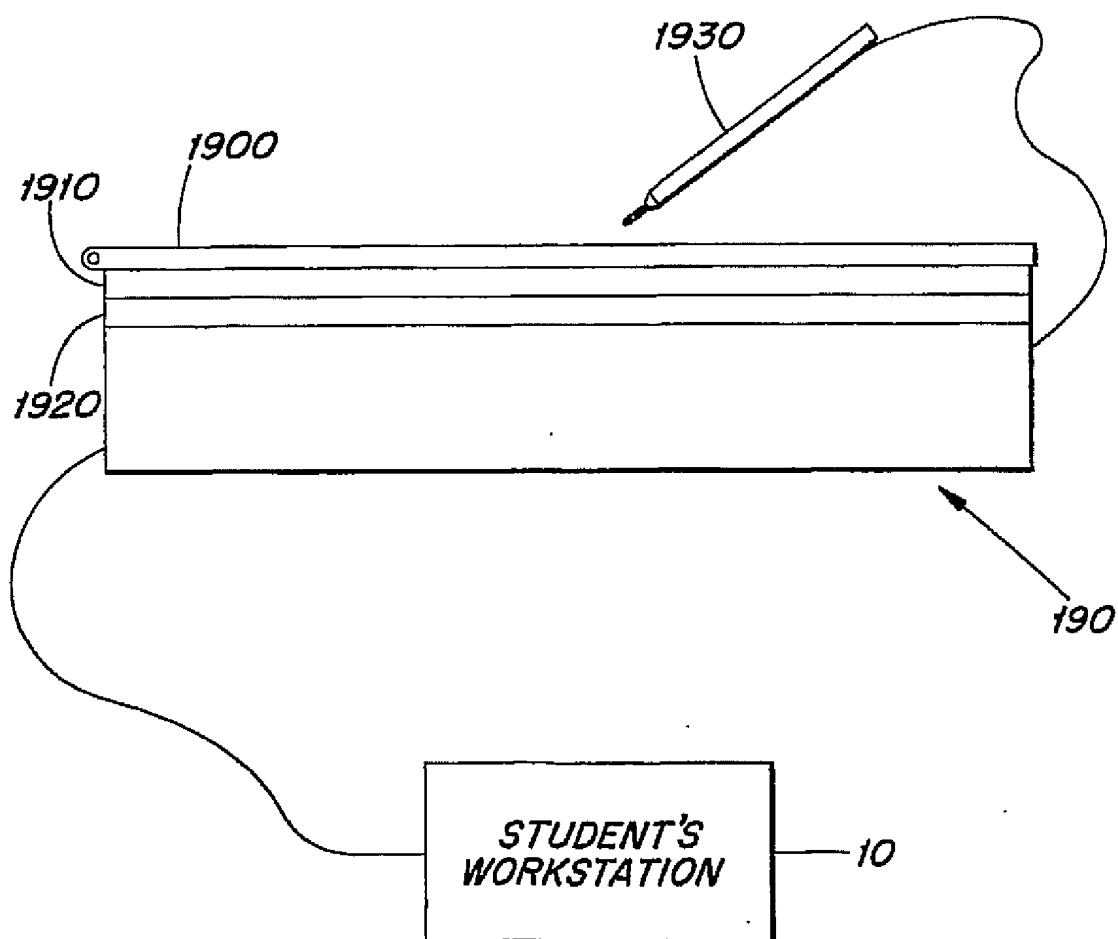


FIGURE 17

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**FIGURE 18**

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Fig. 19(a)

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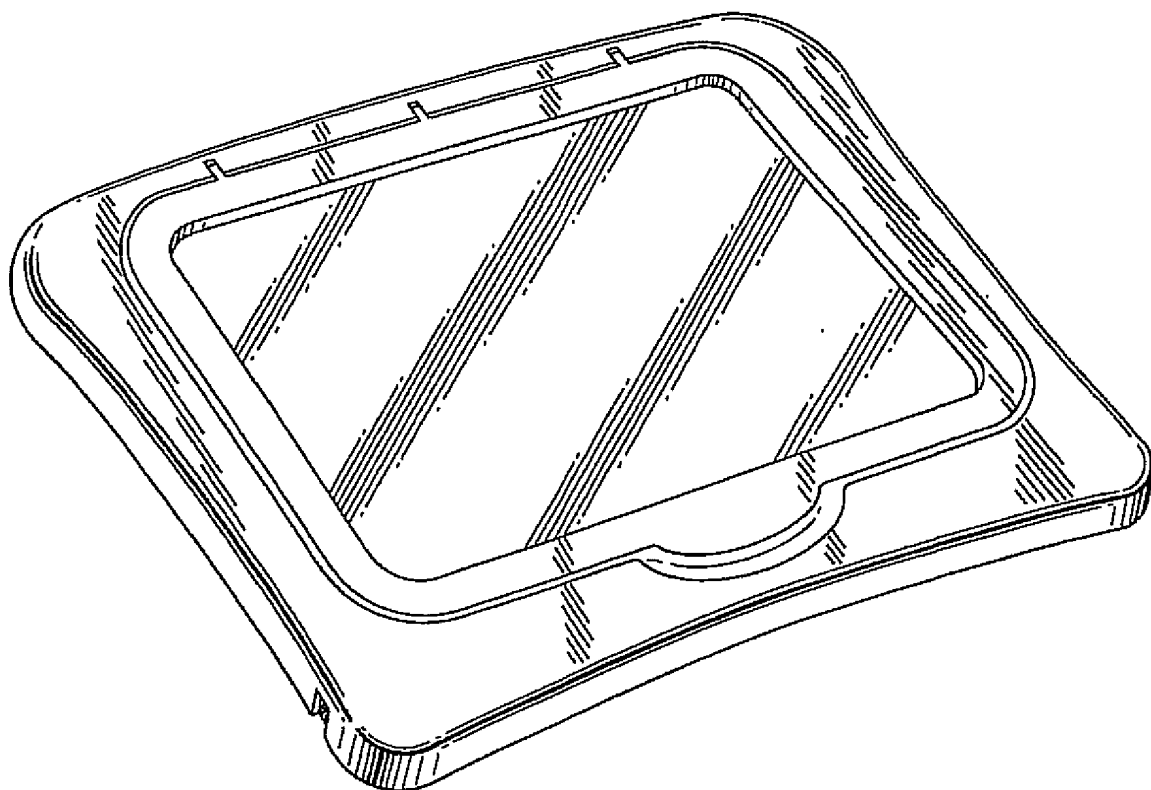
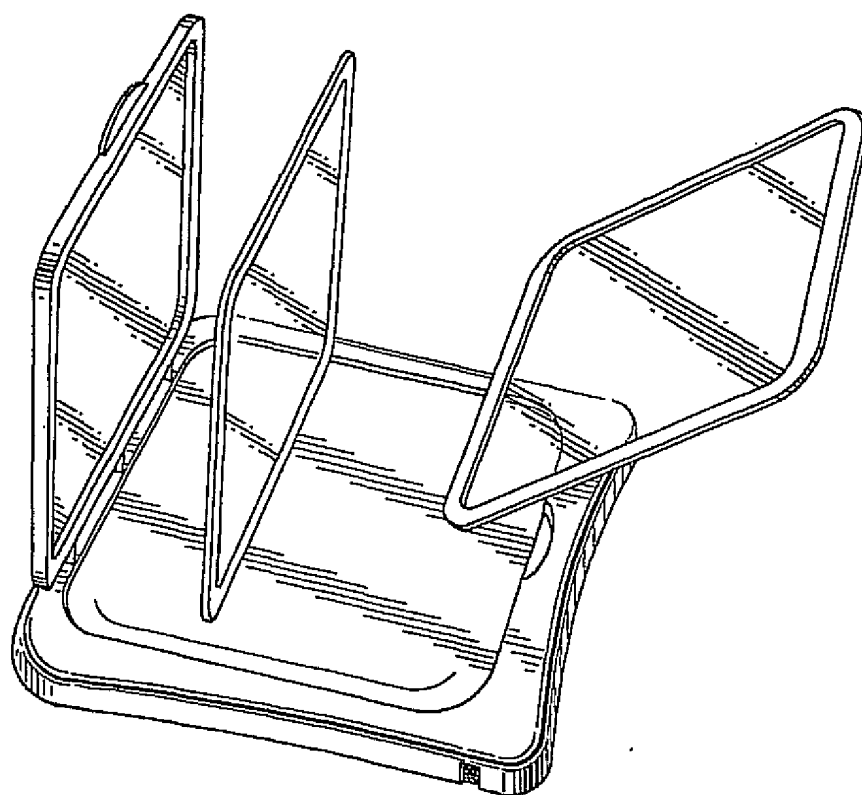


Fig. 20(a)

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Fig. 20(b)



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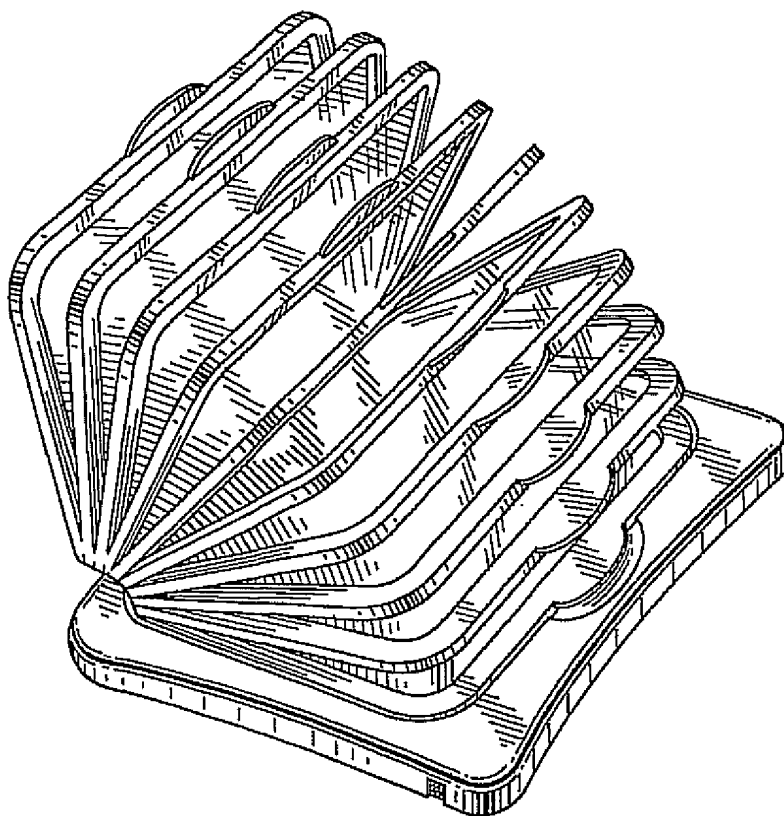


Fig. 20(c)

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/40686

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : G09B 11/00

US CL : 434/162

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 434/162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 158, 159, 160, 85, 87, 88, 90, 91, 92, 155

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
Please See Continuation Sheet

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5,559,897 A (BROWN et al) 24 September 1996, See entire document.	
A	US 5,247,138 A (LANDMEIER) 21 September 1993, See entire document.	
A	US 5,730,602 A (GIERHART et al) 24 March 1998, See entire document.	
A	US 4,793,810 A (BEASLEY, Jr.) 27 December 1988, See entire document.	
A	US 4,887,968 A (WICKSTEAD et al) 19 December 1989, See entire document.	
A	US 4,633,436 A (FLURRY) 30 December 1986, See entire document.	
A	US 3,827,164 A (HALE) 06 August 1974, See entire document.	
A	US 6,215,901 B1 (SCHWARTZ) 10 April 2001, See entire document.	

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T" Inter document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"E" earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&" document member of the same patent family
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

07 August 2001 (07.08.2001)

Date of mailing of the international search report

30 AUG 2001

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Telephone No. 703-308-1148

Sheila Venev
Paralegal Specialist
Technology Center 3700

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/40686

Continuation of B. FIELDS SEARCHED Item 3:

EAST

search terms handwrit\$ and analy\$